

**Session 5 – Meeting of the
Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Disability**

**Tuesday 31st January 2017, 9.30am-12pm, Scottish Parliament –
Room TG20.21**

Attendees:

MSPs: Jeremy Balfour MSP (Convenor), Alexander Stewart MSP

Secretary: Layla Theiner (Disability Agenda Scotland), Jo Waddell
(Disability Agenda Scotland)

Treasurer: Mike Harrison (Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance)

Attendees: Matthew Cresser (Equalities and Rights), Terry Robinson
(Inclusion Scotland), Bill Scott (Inclusion Scotland), David Nicholson
(Scottish Churches Disability Group), John Ballantine (SATA),
Heather Fiskin (ILIS), Claire Hill, Stan Flett (Aberdeen Action on
Disability), Julie Taylor (PAMIS), Mandy Burns (Quarriers), Sam
Louden (Capability Scotland), Liam Beattie (HIV Scotland), Carlyne
Hunter (Freya's Mum), Michelle Coup (MECOPP), Asna Singh
(independent), Jessie Awar (EARN), Cate Vallis (RNIB Scotland),
Craig Smith (SAMH), Alan Dalziel (Action on Hearing Loss
Scotland), Tom Wightman (Pasda), Heather Noller (Carers Trust
Scotland), Robert McGeachy (Camphill Scotland), Ashleigh de
Verteuil (Leonard Cheshire Disability), Morven Brooks (SDGF), Rob
Murray (Changing Faces), Susan Slover (independent), Theresa
Sanderson (Drake Music Scotland), Rebecca Scarlett (Lead
Scotland), Maureen McAllister (Arthritis Care), John Turley (Site
Scotland), Robin Wickes (Edinburgh Access Panel), Peter Scott (ILF
Scotland), Nadeem Hanif (ILF Scotland), Jackie Maceira (WDAP)

Apologies:

Jackie Baillie MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP, Sheila Duffy (ASH
Scotland), John Sutherland MBE (Disability Employment Specialist),
Angela MacLeod (Stroke Association), Maggie (Margaret) Ellis
(PhoneAbility), Delia Henry (Action on Hearing Loss Scotland), Billy

Watson (SAMH), Janice Connelly, Peter Carruthers (South Edinburgh Amenities Group, Community Transport)

Minutes:

Welcome, introductions and apologies

Apologies were first given for the restrictions incurred by the size of the meeting room and thanks for people's understanding of this.

Jeremy Balfour welcomed attendees to this meeting and proffered apologies on behalf of a number of MSPs who had other commitments. He welcomed Jeanne Freeman, the Minister for Social Security to the meeting and explained that her portfolio of responsibilities includes disability issues.

He outlined the five long term ambitions continued with the Fairer Scotland for Disabled People Delivery Plan, a copy of this Plan had been circulated by email with the agenda. The Plan contains 93 actions to be delivered over a five year period.

Discussion with Jeane Freeman, Minister for Social Security including responsibility for disability issues

The Minister introduced herself and said that, rather than spend time briefing on the Delivery Plan which she had assumed most people's familiarity with, she proceeded to take questions and accepted others on the forthcoming Social Security powers and other immediate issues.

The Minister stressed the importance of recognising the co-productive nature of the report and the Government's long term commitment to working with disabled people and the organisations that represent them. The Plan is founded on a rights based approach and she noted that the delivery of the actions will be a challenge across all sectors, Government departments and across all political parties. As Cabinet Secretary, Jeanne Freeman MSP, has the ultimate responsibility to ensure this is undertaken and that the actions detailed in the report are delivered.

Following publication of the Delivery Plan, the next step is to discuss priorities with disabled people and organisations. Scotland will also be submitting evidence to the United Nations enquiry with regard to the UK's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the international human rights treaty).

The Minister, Jeanne Freeman, invited questions, a summary of which follow:

Regarding the engagement of local authorities and the private sector with the Plan she acknowledged the challenge of engaging with these sectors. Local authorities had participated in the Plan's development and would continue to be involved through CoSLA (the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities), Housing Associations and other routes. There had been some good engagement on the report principles by some of the private sector with more progressive and rights based approaches to employment, not seeing disability as an obstacle to employment. These employers will be engaged as champions as evidence demonstrates that employers are inclined to listen to others.

On the subject of housing, there was much agreement following a point raised regarding inappropriate adaptations can often demand significant compromises by disabled people in order to remain in their own homes. In the example shared the kitchen units were inaccessible due to their height and the sitting room had been converted into a bedroom which was poorly considered and resulted in very stressful living arrangements. The Minister agreed that there was often a mindset that needed to be overturned when adapting homes and there was a significant challenge to building fully accessible homes as part of the Government's commitment to building 50,000 new homes within this parliamentary term.

Bill from Inclusion Scotland alerted attendees to the responsibility the charity has to write the shadow report on behalf of Civic Scotland with regard to the aforementioned United Nation's enquiry. This report will be submitted in March and attendees were invited to give feedback on the implementation of the rights contained within the

treaty. The approach to co-production of the Delivery Plan was commended and the Minister was asked whether a similar approach would be used for the new Social Security powers.

The Minister responded by highlighting the deliberate naming of Social Security and its collective investment and entitlement principles. It will be founded on the basis of fairness, dignity and respect and in order to make this happen it cannot be designed by the Scottish Government alone. The consultation received 524 written responses and is supplemented by notes from many meetings. Half of the responses were from individuals and half from organisations. In a few weeks, the independent analysis will be published and a Government response will follow. In the next few weeks recruitment packs will be published to facilitate the recruitment of 2,000 volunteers with relevant experience to assist with the design of the new benefits, this approach will ensure that a high level of co-production continues. Key focus will be given to the assessment process, data sharing and the role of health and social care in delivering a more fair Social Security system. A further report on progress will be given at a future meeting of the cross party group which the Minister offered to attend. The Scottish Government has made a commitment to the full delivery of all 11 benefits by the end of this parliamentary term although some will commence sooner e.g. Universal Credit.

A member shared her experience and frustration of the existing benefit system which has made it very difficult for her to find appropriate support for her disabled daughter to enable her (the member), to be able to return to work. She highlighted the importance of work to her own health and well being and for the development of her career. It has been possible to find support for respite but not for attending work or training. The Minister expressed concern at the situation and the need for attitudinal change to ensure that people are helped to achieve their goals. The Minister offered to discuss the situation further following the meeting.

There followed a discussion about the Carer's Allowance and how this might be changed in the future to ensure that Carers receive the support they need. A commitment has already been made to raise

the benefit's value to equal Job Seekers Allowance but there were challenges regards the timing of its delivery in relation to the development of the new Social Security System in Scotland. There will also be discussion on earning thresholds, young carers and transition when a caring role ends. In particular the need for a package of support and flexibility for young carers had been recognised by Nicola Sturgeon and there have been high level cross department meetings to discuss this, it is hoped that a proposal for a package of support may be available by Easter. It is expected that the new Social Security experience panels will help inform many of the aforementioned decisions. The need to work across all Government departments and local health and social care boards was emphasised again.

Confirmation of the timing of the transfer and introduction of the new Social Security Powers was asked for. The Minister highlighted that Westminster had to pass a commencement order before the Scottish Government could assume the legal authority to deliver a Social Security Agency. There is a commitment to publishing a Bill before June 2016 which will take a year to receive Royal Assent so this is expected by Summer 2018. The commencement of responsibility for the benefits will be one at a time and will be individually tested to learn from each experience, by the end of this Parliament i.e. Spring 2021 there will be a fully functioning Social Security Agency in Scotland delivering 11 benefits to an estimated 1.4 million people.

There were also discussions about employment and the actions continued within the Delivery Plan. In particular Action 31 which recognises the success of Project SEARCH in enabling young people with learning disabilities and autism to secure sustainable employment. The Minister identified Jamie Hepburn as the lead for employment and would discuss the promotion of this action point with him in due course.

At this point, the Minister had to be excused from the meeting but made a commitment to return at a future date to discuss Social Security and other matters as appropriate. She also invited further questions by email if attendees wished to contact her.

Jeremy Balfour MSP gave thanks on behalf of the Group.

Action: Jeremy to send letter to Jeane to thank her for attending the meeting.

Review of minutes from the last meeting.

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the previous meeting. Jeremy Balfour MSP noted the topics agreed for the Group's consideration and we would work our way through those topics at future meetings.

Layla Theiner reported that following the last meeting a google diary had been established for members to update with events of general interest to the Group. DAS will monitor and add to the diary but it is for other members to make this shared document useful. The link to the calendar is:

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=jo@disabilityagenda.scot&ctz=Europe/London>

Action: Members to update the calendar with key dates and other information.

Jeremy highlighted the number of apologies from MSPs for this morning's meeting and the diary conflict that they experienced with other engagements. He proposed that to avoid this in future the meetings may be rescheduled to a lunchtime or evening to work around the parliamentary calendar.

Joint meetings with other Cross Party Groups were discussed and were agreed to, where subject areas were of wider interest e.g. employment or social security with Groups such as Visual Impairment, Deafness, Carers and Learning Disability.

Action: It was agreed that a joint meeting be held in September to discuss the Social Security Bill and employment issues, it is likely that this meeting may be held outwith the Parliament to accommodate numbers. Layla to progress this and keep the CPG members updated. Others are welcome to input.

Action: There will be another CPG Disability group meeting in the interim, in Edinburgh, and notice will be given in due course.

Treasurer's update.

The Treasurer, Mike Harrison, had set up a bank account for the Group. Thanks were expressed on behalf of the Group and members accepted the terms.

Action: Mike will invoice members for £20 to cover the costs of refreshments.

Possible draft joint statement

Jeremy Balfour asked members whether they would support the adoption of a joint statement which would identify the key principles and purpose of the Group. A similar approach has been adopted by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability at Westminster although there is nothing similar in Scotland.

The purpose would be to achieve clarity over the role of the Group and increase its profile with MSPs and other organisations. Members would be invited to support the statement and it would clearly demonstrate the cross organisational voice and representation of the Group.

Action: It was suggested and agreed that Layla Theiner would draft a two page statement with support from other volunteers from the group. Anyone who is interested in being involved should contact Layla directly (layla@disabilityagenda.scot). The draft will be circulated to all members and would aim to be agreed at the next meeting.

It was suggested that the statement could include reference to the existing principles of the UNCRPD and those of the Social Care legislation. It could also reference the Fairer Scotland for Disabled People Delivery Plan. The statement should call for the full delivery

of the Plan and highlight the 1 in 5 people in Scotland who are disabled.

The purpose and impact of cross party groups was briefly discussed and their role in changing and influencing policy was considered.

Updates from individuals and organisations on activities and developments to the group.

A member asked if anyone was aware that the HMRC is proposing to consult on the removal of VAT relief for disabled people, for products designed or adapted for their own personal or domestic use. Some attendees were aware of this issue, although this is a matter that might also be of interest to a number of others and other cross party groups. Jeremy Balfour MSP noted the concern over this issue and highlighted that VAT is a reserved issue.

The forthcoming launch of a report by Glasgow University's Training and Employment Research Unit was highlighted. The report will publish its research around the issues that people with arthritis face remaining in work or getting back to work if they have been off sick.

It was also noted that the Transport Minister Humza Yousef will be visiting Waverley Station on the 16th of March to witness the difficulties experienced by disabled people accessing the station, in particular the challenge of the current taxi rank location will be highlighted.

Members were also alerted to the current consultation on the UK Government's Health and Work green paper which contains many positive proposals but there are particular concerns on the detail of section 1444 which proposes to extend conditionality to the ESA support group. The consultation closes on the 17th of February.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/work-health-and-disability-improving-lives>

Changing Faces are currently running a research project to look at the everyday lives of people living with a disfigurement. More information is on the charities' website:

<https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/resources/face-equality/disfigurement-in-the-uk>

Next meeting

Jeremy Balfour asked for suggested topics for the next meeting, which would take place before the summer recess. Members suggested issues including accessible toilets, adapted housing and accessible new build homes (including relevant planning laws). There was agreement that this would be a useful topic area for the next meeting considering the Government's commitment to building 50,000 new homes and proposed changes to planning legislation. The Minister for Planning should be invited to attend with a relevant speaker from CoSLA to discuss local government practice and guidelines in this area.

A member highlighted wider concerns regarding the state of the built environment and disabled people's restricted access to spaces due to a wide variety of barriers.

Any other business.

There was no other business.

Members were again thanked for their understanding re the issues over the room size and access. Jeremy Balfour MSP warmly thanked everyone for attending the meeting.